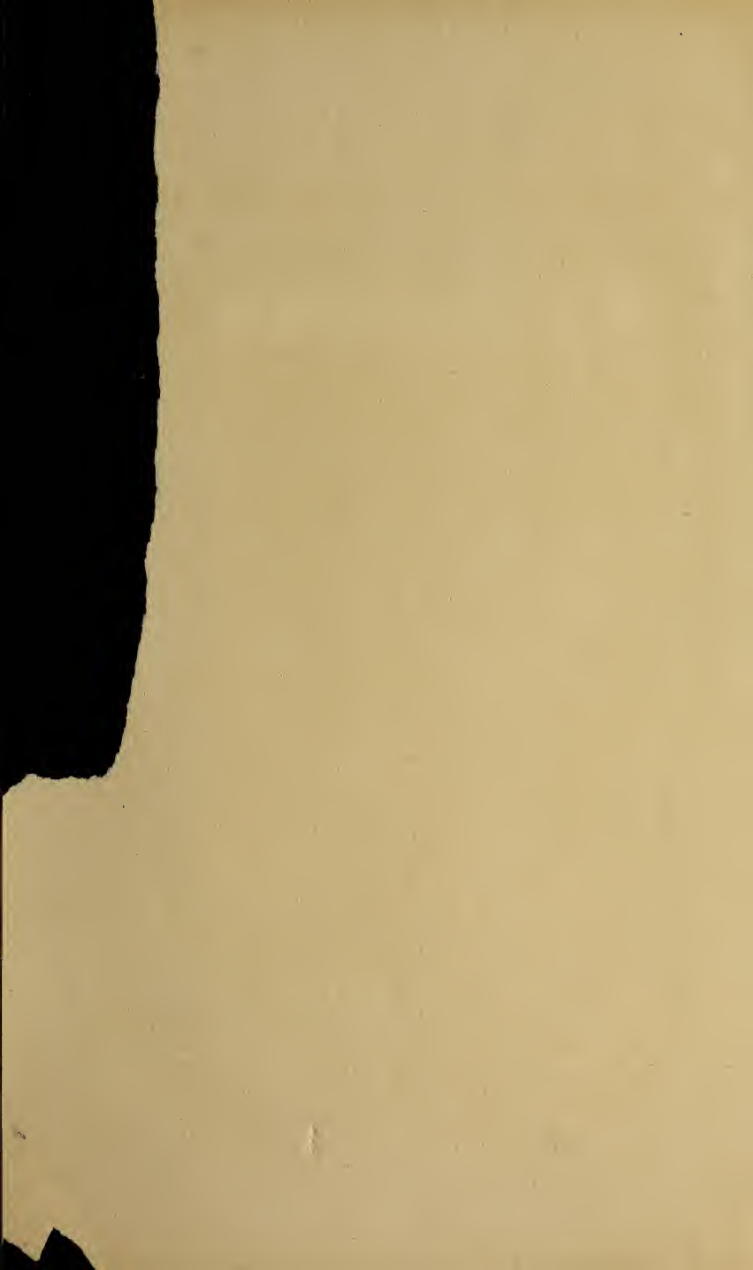




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FOUR LETTERS

RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED TO THE
WORKING MEN OF AMERICA.

"Error of opinion may safely be tolerated, where reason is left free to combat it."

In times like the present, when the working men of the country hold its destinies in their hands, to wield them for good or ill, and when all men, even bankers, brokers, speculators and non-producers of every description, claim to be the exclusive friends of the laborer, it behoves them to look about with enquiring eyes, and after proving all things, to decide for themselves, who are their real and who their pretended friends. To aid them in this work we publish the following letters from prominent and distinguished men; and, that there may be no misapprehension of the first, we give also that to which it is a reply.

PHILADELPHIA, Aug. 20, 1840.

To the Hon. M. VAN BUREN, President of the United States:

Dear Sir—The undersigned, a portion of your fellow-citizens, request your answers to the following queries—

Are you in favor of a Protective Tariff?

Did you vote for, or support a property qualification for voters in the Convention of New York?

Are you in favor of reducing the standard of Wages?

Whether you are in favor of the Secretary of War's plan for organizing the Militia?

These questions are not made for the purpose of unfriendly criticism, but only from a sincere wish to have your own views on these subjects.

Your Fellow Citizens,

ISAAC LIPPINCOTT,

WM. R. POTTS,

G. HAINES,

N. B. EVANS,

A. S. FERMAN,

JOSEPH FRAYER.

Direct to Isaac Lippincott, No. 210 Callowhill street.

WASHINGTON, Sept. 14th, 1840.

Gentlemen:—I have received your letter propounding to me several questions upon public subjects, and assuring me that they are not put for the purpose of unfriendly criticism, but from a sincere desire to have my own views on the subjects referred to.

In reply to your first and last questions, I send you a copy of a letter

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recently addressed to several citizens of Elizabeth City County, Va., in which you will find the information you desire.

In answer to your second question, I send you a statement of my entire course in the New York Convention upon the subject of the elective franchise. It was prepared by my friends at Albany, having access to the best means of information, of their own accord, without previous communication with me, and published there under their own signatures. Upon a careful examination of this document, I find it contains a true and fair exposition of my course in the Convention upon the subject referred to, and I send it to you as such.

Your remaining question is whether I "am in favor of reducing the standard of wages."

Not comprehending precisely the idea you desire to convey by the term "the standard of wages," it will be necessary in order to meet your wishes fully, that I should give my general views on this branch of your enquiry.

The labor of an industrious man is in my judgment only adequately rewarded, when his wages, together with the assistance of those members of his family, from whom assistance may reasonably be required, will enable him to provide comfortably for himself and them, to educate his children, and lay up sufficient for the casualties of life and the wants of advanced age.

To accomplish these objects it is necessary that the pay of the laborer should bear a just proportion to the prices of the necessaries and comforts of life; and all attempts to depress them below this equitable standard, are in my opinion, at war as well with the dictates of humanity, as with a sound and rational policy. Left to itself, and free from the blighting influence of partial legislation, monopolies, congregated wealth and interested combinations, the compensation of labor will always preserve this salutary relation. It is only when the natural order of society is disturbed by one or other of these causes, that the wages of labor become inadequate.

The people of the United States may be truly denominated a nation of laborers.—A vast proportion of them live by the sweat of their brow, and the continued exercise of a persevering industry. It was with a proper regard to this condition, that the system of Government under which they live was originally devised. It should therefore, in my opinion, be always so administered, as to insure to them, as far as possible, a just and adequate reward for their exertions, as well as a full enjoyment of the fruits of their industry.

In the distribution of wealth resulting from the union of labor and capital, it is too often the case that an undue proportion falls to the share of the latter. The discontinuance of partial legislation, which I have always advocated, would be an important step towards correcting this inequality.

It has ever been my design to keep these objects constantly in view. So far from being in favor of reducing the wages of labor, or attempting to render the services required disproportionate to the rewards received, it cannot be unknown to you that what is called the ten hour system,

originally devised by the mechanics and laborers themselves, has by my directions been adopted, and uniformly carried out at all the public establishments, and that this mitigation of labor has been accompanied by no corresponding reduction of wages.

I also caused it to be distinctly intimated in the month of March last, to the officers of such of these establishments, as might contemplate a reduction of wages, that in my opinion, the present peculiarly uncertain state of things, which it is believed results from circumstances that cannot be permanent in their operation, does not present a just and proper basis for a reduction of wages.

I am far from wishing to contribute in the slightest degree to the embarrassment and depression of the laboring classes. It is on the contrary my most earnest and constant desire that their industry should every where and at all times be amply rewarded, and that the blessings of plenty should be liberally diffused among those who contribute most to their production.

I am, Gentlemen, very respectfully,
Your obedient servant,

M. VAN BUREN.

Messrs. Isaac Lippincott, Wm. R. Potts, G. Haines, N. B. Evans,
A. S. Ferman, Jos. Frayer.

The second is from Marcus Morton, the Democratic Governor of Massachusetts, and the candidate with Mr. Van Buren for re-election. It is an answer to a question propounded to him by the working men of Charlestown. Distinct and to the point as it is, it needs neither explanations or commendations. We say, therefore, read it laborers, and judge for yourselves.

TAUNTON, Aug, 20, 1840.

GENTLEMEN;

It gives me pleasure to comply with your request. I entirely agree with you, "that each individual who possesses the right of suffrage should know the views of the persons presented for his suffrage, on all the important topics which agitate the community." And although I have not received the final nomination, yet my name has been connected with the highest office in the Commonwealth, by such authority and in such form, that I consider myself standing in a relation to the people, which entitles them to my opinions on any subject upon which the official action of the Chief Magistrate may have an influence.

While it is the duty of every government, and of every officer of government, to endeavor by all legitimate means, to encourage industry, to secure the rights and the enjoyment of property, and to ensure to labor the products of its own industry and an adequate remuneration for its services, the latter requires and should receive its peculiar care and especial vigilance; because the laboring classes are the most numerous classes,

because they are the most useful, and because they stand in the greatest need of protection. From the nature of their employments, from their dispersed condition over the country, and from the impossibility of concert of action, they have very great difficulty in asserting their just rights and maintaining their due influence. Is there an inflation of the currency, the hard-handed laborers are the first to feel the consequent rise of prices, and the last to gain an equivalent in the increase of wages. Is there a contraction or depression, they are the first to be thrown out of employ, or to have their wages reduced. Is there a suspension of specie payments, they are sure to be the greatest losers by the depreciated paper. Is there an explosion of Banks, they are the last to be informed of it, and therefore the most likely to have the worthless promises expire in their hands. Every fluctuation, while it may be made to turn to the profit of the speculator, is sure both in its ascent and descent, to bring loss and distress upon those whose attention is engrossed by the pursuits of honest industry. The wisdom of our patriotic ancestors foresaw these evils and provided against their recurrence, the strongest safeguard the sagacity of man could invent, in that provision of our excellent constitution which makes gold and silver the standard and the basis of our circulating medium.

An all-wise Providence has created man with various capacities and powers, mental and physical, admirably adapted, if rightly employed, to supply the wants, to increase the comforts, and to promote the happiness of all. It should be the highest aim of a good government to encourage by every means within its province, the improvement of these faculties in that way and to that degree, that will render them most useful; and the employment of all these powers in that sphere of action, to which they are best adapted, and in which they will best contribute to the well-being of the whole human family. For these ends, it should ever be the aim of government to secure to each human being the fruits of his own toil, and to make those fruits commensurate with the value of his contributions to the common stock.

Knowledge is power. And there is always danger that those who possess it, may add to it cunning, and take advantage of the less informed and more confiding, to depress the value of their services, and to deprive them of that proportion of the products of nature and art, to which by their contributions they are justly entitled.—Wealth, not less than knowledge, confers power. In this country, property, which should ever be held sacred, draws to itself adventitious considerations and influence. It is to its possessor, in too great a degree, a substitute for intelligence, virtue and patriotism. Its functions, in ministering to the wants and promoting the improvement of mankind, are highly important. But it may be used for oppression as well as for improvement; and when wealth and knowledge and cunning are united, especially if in hands not individually responsible for their use, they possess a power dangerous to the rights of labor; a power too often used to destroy the freedom of mind, as well as to depreciate the labors of the body; a power stimulated by cupidity and made to minister to ambition. To guard against the unrighteous exercise of such a power, is a high duty of government, as difficult as it is important to exercise.

Much cannot be done by direct action. It will evade laws and break down barriers created for its restraint. The most wise and efficient mode of checking its encroachments, is to raise by moral and intellectual improvement the capacities of those upon whom its action is most unjust and oppressive; to enable them to resist or counteract its efforts. The mind must be improved as well as the body. If the whole time is devoted to the labors of the body, the cultivation of the mind will necessarily be neglected. Encouragement therefore should be held out for the improvement of our moral, intellectual and physical powers.—But this must depend mainly upon the laborers themselves. Much, very much, may be expected from their independence, their moral firmness, and their self-respect. They must never forget the moral, religious and political equality of mankind; nor the consequent obligation upon each individual to prepare himself to perform his equal part in the affairs of the world. They must remember the responsibility which rests upon each one, to be governed by the convictions of his own mind, undismayed by wealth or power, uninfluenced by appeals to passion, or unmeaning parade.

But much may be done by government, and much by public sentiment, to promote a proper tone of thought and action on these subjects.—Each laborer is a freeman, and has a right to labor as many or as few days, and as many or as few hours in each day, as he may judge right. And no human power has a right to decide for him, how much or how little he shall labor. This he must decide for himself, upon his responsibility to his God. Government might, if it was expedient, determine how many hours should be deemed a day's work, as well as determine how many quarts shall be called a bushel, or how many pounds a ton. But it cannot properly establish the price of a day's work, or coerce individuals to perform more or less than a day's work in a day.

But while a great proportion of laborers should be left to regulate the time of labor as well as the price, for themselves, as with their employers; there are certain branches of industry, and extensive and important ones, too, where, from the number employed together, and the nature of the business, there must be established regular hours of work, to which all employed must consent to conform. In all such cases, by mutual consultation between laborers and employers, such hours should be established, having due regard to the interests of the employers, as will promote the health, the comfort, and above all, the moral and intellectual improvement of those who do the work. And I believe it is a great mistake to think, that in this respect their interests oppose each other. *Ten hours*, with fresh and vigorous muscles, and a clear and intelligent mind, will accomplish more and better work, than *fourteen* with a body languid and exhausted by long continued efforts, and a mind rendered dull by the lassitude of the body. If this be so, the employed might, even without injury to their employers, have the residue of the day for reinvigorating the system, for social enjoyment, and for the improvement of their mental and moral powers. And probably *TEN HOURS* labor a day is as much as the human system is capable of, consistently with the proper preservation and improvement of all its faculties. Where therefore the nature of the busi-

ness requires that uniform hours of labor should be established, more than TEN hours a day would seem to be unreasonable. I must therefore say, in answer to your direct inquiry in relation to "the introduction of the ten-hour system" into the United States service, that it meets my entire and cordial approbation. While it will be highly beneficial to the workman, it will not, in my opinion, be unfavorable to the interests of the United States.

This system, as it acts upon a very inconsiderable portion of the laborers of the country may be thought to be unimportant. But the establishment of a standard measure of a days work may grow into a general usage and extend over the country, so as to govern many kinds of labor. And a usage, which would give to laborers several hours of each day, for innocent recreation, for friendly intercourse, and for the cultivation of their moral and intellectual faculties, would tend to improve the health, the social feelings, the intelligence and virtue, and the general happiness and real respectability, as well as the efficiency of the laboring classes.

I am, Gentlemen, with great respect,

Your friend and fellow citizen,

MARCUS MORTON.

TO MESSRS. OLIVER J. CONANT, President; WM. D. BUTTS, Vice President; ALBERT M. SIMPSON, Secretary; PHILLIP B. HOLMES, Corresponding Secretary; of a meeting of the Mechanics and Working men of Charlestown and the neighboring towns.

The third is from a source no less eminent. It comes from a mind free from the influence of political ambition—from a man whose whole life has been devoted to the promotion of peace on earth and good will among men. Prominent in a body whose vocation is the advancement of "peace and conciliation," his friends invited him to participate in a public festival, the following is his reply. Those who are familiar with the productions of Bishop England might recognize it, brief as it is, had he not affixed his signature to it.

COLUMBUS, July 25th, 1840.

Gentlemen,—I have been honored by your invitation to attend, on Tuesday next, at the feast to be given in honor of certain distinguished citizens of Georgia and Alabama, by the Democratic citizens of Muscogee county.

Generally speaking, I think it would be more prudent for me to unite with my fellow citizens only at the ballot box, in using my right as a member of the Republic, to approve or to censure the conduct of those to whom we entrust the guardianship of our liberties. On the present occasion I feel the additional force of a monition given by my brethren at the last council (a few months since) upon this very subject, in a pastoral letter. I trust, then, that my respectfully declining your invitation will not be considered as wanting in courtesy to you. The body to which I

belong, professes to be one of peace and conciliation ; should its members unite actively with political parties mutually opposed, while each declares that it seeks only the prosperity of our Republic, their capacity to promote peace and conciliation would be at an end.

You will feel that the influence of such a ministry of good will, would in your present state of excitement, be useful if not necessary, and I am sure you will approve of the determination by which I am bound. I think however, I may venture to say that the best remedy for our present unfortunate position, is to be found in preferring industry to speculation, labor to cabal, economy to ostentation, patient and persevering frugality to dissipation. I therefore consider that man who aids in making our lands productive, to be our most useful citizen ; I regard the laborious, well conducted mechanic, as preferable to the speculator in stocks, or to the usurer. The former creates the wealth of a nation, the latter endeavors to get it into his possession under the pretext of its management. I also believe that our Federal Government has had as little influence in producing the present distress in our states, as I had in producing that which afflicts Europe ; and that it has as little power to alleviate that distress as it has constitutional right to interfere with its causes.

Some of our most eminent citizens have expressed deliberate opinions widely differing from mine. I have given full consideration of their reasoning but cannot come into their conclusions. In one point, however, I should hope we could all unite ; that laying aside unkind feelings, bitterness, strife and mere partizan attachments, we should endeavor to bring back our habits of good republican simplicity ; and zealous for our country's good, endeavor, by the peaceable process of the ballot box, to place in the administration of our government those citizens, whom, in the presence of God, we should conscientiously regard as the best qualified to promote the general good, by the sacrifice of predilections, by preserving us in peace and safety in our domestic relations, in our sacred homes, and maintaining us in full possession of our rights, having our commerce untrammelled by monopoly, by sectional preferences, or by facilities created by the use of the public purse, and by sustaining us in our strength by having the bond of our Union most firmly interwoven by our affections, so as to secure to us the respect and confidence of the world abroad. It is the good of our country which requires that we should endeavor to unite all our fellow citizens for this desirable object. Let us endeavor, by affectionate interchange of views to effect it.

Believe me to be, with sentiments of high esteem, your obliged fellow citizen,

† JOHN, Bishop of Charleston.

To John H. Howard, Esq., Chairman, and the other members of the Committee of Democratic Citizens, Muscogee County.

The fourth, and last, comes to us as a voice from the mighty dead. It was written by the father of our country, George Washington, to Thomas Stone, a Senator in the legislature of Maryland, and as truth is

eternal, knowing neither change nor the shadow of change, its maxims apply as well to paper money and its baneful influences at this time, as they did in 1787. The letter will be found on page 231 of the 9th volume of Spark's life of Washington.

MOUNT VERNON, VA, 16 February, 1787.

Dear Sir:—Your favor of the 30th ult. came duly to hand. To give an opinion in a cause of so much importance as that which has warmly agitated the two branches of your legislature, and which from the appeal that is made, is likely to create great and perhaps dangerous divisions, is rather a delicate matter, but as this diversity of opinion is on a subject which has, I believe, occupied the minds of most men, and as my sentiments thereon have been fully and decidedly expressed long before the Assembly either of Maryland or this State was convened, I do not scruple to declare, that, if I had a voice in your Legislature, it would have been given decidedly against a PAPER EMISSION upon the general principles of its utility as a representative, and the necessity of it as a medium.

To assign reasons for this opinion, would be as unnecessary as tedious. The ground has been so often trod that a place hardly remains untouched. In a word, the necessity arising from a want of specie is represented as greater than it really is. I contend that it is by the substance, not with a shadow of a thing, we are to be benefitted. The wisdom of man, in my humble opinion, cannot at this time devise a plan by which the credit of paper money would be long supported, consequently, depreciation keeps pace with the quantity of the emission, and articles for which it is exchanged rise in a greater ratio than the sinking value of the money. Wherein, then, is the farmer, the planter, the artisan, benefitted. The debtor may be, because, as I have observed, he gives the shadow in lieu of the substance, and in proportion to his gain, the creditor or the body politic suffers. Whether it be a legal tender or not, it will, as has been observed very truly, leave no alternative. It must be that or nothing. An evil equally great is, the door it immediately opens for speculation, by which the least designing, and perhaps most valuable part of the community, are preyed upon by the more knowing and crafty speculators.

But contrary to my intention and declaration, I am offering reasons in support of my opinions; reasons too, which of all others are least pleasing to the advocate of paper money. I shall therefore only observe generally, that so many people have suffered by former emissions, that, like a burnt child who dreads the fire, no person will touch it who can possibly avoid it. The natural consequence of which will be, that the specie, which remains unexported, will be instantly locked up.

With great esteem and regard,

I am, dear sir, &c.,

GEORGE WASHINGTON.



